

## **REFORMED EXPERIMENTAL (EXPERIENTIAL) PREACHING**

*(Syllabus for Course #512, Homiletics II, Joel R. Beeke)*

### **I. Course Description**

Defines and explains both the discriminatory and applicatory dimensions of Reformed experiential preaching. Examines how major Reformers, English Puritans, Dutch Second Reformation divines, and two great preachers from each of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasized the experiential dimension of vital Christianity in their sermons, then addresses the question: How can Reformed ministers best preach experientially today?

### **II. Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Understand how the experimental dimension of vital Christianity was preached by the major Reformers, English Puritans, Dutch Second Reformation divines, and a few great preachers from each of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.
2. Apply what we learn about experimental preaching to contemporary preaching.
3. Practice the basics of experimental preaching by writing sermons on texts that emphasize the experience of vital Christian truth in the soul and life of the believer.
4. Know the primary strengths and weaknesses associated with experimental preaching.

### **III. Course Texts**

#### **Required reading**

*\*=recommended to purchase*

\* Adams, Jay. *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.  
Read entire book.

\* Beeke, Joel R. *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism*. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008, pp. 255-74.

\* \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Quest for Full Assurance*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999.  
Chapters 4-6 and appendix.

- \*Bridges, Charles. *The Christian Ministry*. Reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, pp. 239-282.
- \*Bunyan, John. *Paul's Departure and Crown*. Swengel, Penn.: Reiner, 1969. Read entire book.
- \*Edwards, Jonathan. *Altogether Lovely*. Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997, pp. 1-14, 61-114, 181-202, 217-238.
- Elias, John. *The Experimental Knowledge of Christ and Additional Sermons of John Elias (1774-1841)*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006. Sermons 1, 2, 9, 11.
- Ferguson, Sinclair. "Preaching to the Heart." In *Feed My Sheep*, ed. Don Kistler. Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 101-116.
- \*Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971, chapters, 1-6, 9-11, 16.
- Logan, Samuel T., Jr., ed. *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*. Phillipsburg: P & R, 1986, introduction and chapters 2, 14.
- \*Old, Hughes Oliphant. *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 4, The Age of the Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 251-329, 449-473.
- \*Old, Hughes Oliphant. *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian church: Volume 5, Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, pp. 168-293.
- \*Packer, James I. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990. Chapters 1, 6-7, 10, 15, 17-18, 20.
- Ryken, Leland. *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986. Read chapter 6.

### **Recommended reading:**

- Jennings, John. "Of Particular and Experimental Preaching," in *The Christian Pastor's Manual*. Reprint, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991, pp. 47-62.
- Levy, Babette May. *Preaching in the First Half Century of New England History*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1945.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Out of the Depths*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1995.
- Nuttall, Geoffrey F. *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Practice*. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Old, Hughes Oliphant. *The Reading and Preaching of Scriptures*, vols. 4-5. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003-2005.
- Pipa, Joseph A. "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching." Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), 1985.
- Teellinck, Willem. *The Path of True Godliness*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006.
- van der Walt, A. G. P. "Calvin on Preaching," in *John Calvin's Institutes: His Opus Magnum*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1986, pp. 326-341.
- Wisse, Gerard. *Christ's Ministry in the Christian: The Administration of His Offices in the Believer*. Sioux Center, IA: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, 1993.

## IV. Course Requirements

1. A final exam of six essay questions based on both class lectures and reading assignments (50% of grade).
2. A 15-20 page paper is required which should be (1) a study (scriptural, theological, historical, or a combination) of some aspect of experiential preaching; (2) a study of a sermon(s) of a particular minister noted for an experiential emphasis in his preaching; or (3) two of your own sermons (written out in full) based on a portion of Scripture which emphasizes spiritual experience. (Th.M. students must complete number 1 or 2, and number 3.) (50% of grade).
3. The completion of the required reading assignments.  
Record the percentage of the reading assignments completed on the bottom of the final exam.

## V. Course Outline

### I. Introduction to "Experimental Preaching"

#### A. Basic questions

1. What is experimental religion and experimental preaching?
2. What is the difference between insufficient "head" knowledge and saving "heart" knowledge?
3. Is there a difference between the terms, experimental and experiential?
4. Why is the experimental dimension of preaching necessary?

#### B. Probing deeper

1. What are some essential characteristics of proper experiential preaching?
2. How does the offer of grace function in experiential preaching?
3. What is the relationship between Reformed experiential preaching and Reformed piety or spirituality?
4. Why is it essential that the called minister be experientially prepared for the ministry?
5. What is the primary difference between preaching and lecturing?

## II. Reformation Experimental Preaching

### A. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)

1. Dependency on the Spirit
2. *Sola scriptura*
3. *Solus Christus*
4. The style and content of *The Decades*

### B. Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531)

1. Experimental themes
  - a. Exposing sin
  - b. Reflecting on the consummation
  - c. Exercising repentance
  - d. Gleaning spiritual comfort
2. The context of experimental preaching: the glory of Christ

### C. John Calvin (1509-1564)

1. The centrality, nature, and authority of preaching
2. Stress on piety (*pietas*) in preaching
3. Experience as a theological/spiritual reality
4. Experience and its limitations as a hermeneutical key
5. The experience or sense of faith (*experientia fide* or *sensus fidei*)
6. Experience and predestination
  7. Experience and the process of self-examination

8. Experience and evangelism: case study of preparatory sermons (1558)

D. Theodore Beza (1519-1605)

1. Sermons lack supralapsarian teaching
2. Similar Christological and soteriological emphases as Calvin
3. Tension between polemical and homiletical works

E. Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

1. Experiential order, method, and content
2. Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587) on faith and assurance
3. Preaching the Catechism with an experimental emphasis (Sample: Lord's Day 32, Question 86)

III. Puritan Experimental Preaching

A. Introduction

B. William Perkins (1558-1602)

1. Application of doctrine
2. Divisions of membership
3. Delivery of the sermon

C. Richard Rogers (1550?-1618)

1. "Private Helps to Godliness": watchfulness; meditation; Christian armor; prayer; reading; thankfulness; fasting
2. Goal of "Private Helps": "Daily Directions"
3. Conclusion: Merging of Experimental and Practical (Case Study: Sermon on Judges 13:1-4)

D. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635): The Fountain Opened

(1 Timothy 3:16)

1. "What it is to preach."
2. "What it is to preach Christ."
3. "What it is to preach Christ to the Gentiles."

E. Westminster Assembly (1643-1649)

F. Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680): The Heart of Christ in Heaven to sinners on earth

1. Christ's external demonstration of felt love
2. Christ's internal demonstration of felt love

G. John Bunyan (1628-1688)

1. Preaching from the heart to move the heart
2. Preaching to the heart
  3. Preaching about the heart
    - a. The journey's beginning
    - b. The journey's progress
    - c. The journey's ending

H. Puritan Experimental Preaching Transplanted to America: Thomas Shepard (1605-1649)

1. The Sincere Convert and The Sound Believer
2. The Ten Virgins

I. Conclusion

IV. Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*)  
Experimental Preaching

A. Introduction

B. William Teellinck (1579-1629)

1. Life and writings

2. *The Path of True Godliness*

C. The Canons of Dort (1618-1619) on Preaching

1. "Its urgency: the desperate plight of man"

2. "Its character: preaching as `means of grace'"

3. "Its content: reconciliation by and to God"

4. "Its approach: preaching as `unfeigned' call"

5. "Its aim: God's glory in the salvation of sinners"

D. Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711)

1. *The Christian's Reasonable Service (Redelijke Godsdienst)*

2. Comforting and instructing the regenerate

3. Calling the unregenerate to repentance

E. Abraham Hellenbroek (1658-1731)

1. Life, writings, and sermons

2. Sermon on Matthew 26:36-38

F. Alexander Comrie (1706-1774)

1. Classification, specificity, and the offer of grace

2. *The ABC of Faith*

G. Theodore van der Groe (1705-1784)

1. Proverbs 8:35a

2. Luke 18:13

G. Dutch Reformed Experimental Preaching Transplanted to America: Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747)

1. Proclaiming the doctrine of God experimentally
2. Preaching experimental godliness
3. Applying sermons to different types of parishioners
  - a. The strong or established Christian
  - b. The concerned Christian
  - c. The literal or learned but unconverted
    - d. The ignorant
    - e. The hypocrite
    - f. The openly profane

#### H. Conclusion

### V. Post-Puritan Examples of Experimental Preaching

#### A. Eighteenth century

1. Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754): Faith vs. Sense
2. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): *Great Guilt No Obstacle to the Pardon of the Returning Sinner*
3. Samuel Davies (1723-1761): Convictive Preaching
4. George Whitefield (1714-1770): Power and sovereignty

#### B. Nineteenth century

1. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851): Living faith vs. false faith
2. John Elias (1774-1841)
  - a. "The Danger of Losing One's Soul"
  - b. "The Experimental Knowledge of Christ"
  - c. "God Attending the Contrite in Spirit"



3. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)

a. "The Inward Experience of Believers" (Rom. 7:22)

b. "Christ in You" (Col. 1:27)

C. Twentieth century

1. Gerard Wisse (1873-1957): Christ's Ministry in the Christian

a. How Christ teaches misery, redemption, and sanctification as Prophet

b. How Christ teaches misery, redemption, and sanctification as Priest

c. How Christ teaches misery, redemption, and sanctification as King

2. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1900-1981)

a. Evangelistic preaching:  
True Christian Discipleship (John 6:66-68)

b. Instructional-experimental preaching:  
Imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1-2)

VI. Lessons on Preaching Experientially Today

A. Need for balance

1. Objective and subjective preaching

2. Sovereignty of God and responsibility of man

3. Experimental dimension but one aspect of preaching

4. Preach experientially with diversity by focusing on Scripture

B. Need for application

1. Prerequisites to effective application

- a. Live close to God
  - b. Keep studying
  - c. Understand human nature
  - d. Know your parishioners
  - e. Speak naturally yet earnestly
  - f. Pray for continued dependency upon the Spirit
  - g. Cultivate pure motivation
- 2. Application: preaching the truth
  - a. Preaching the truth about God
  - b. Preaching the truth about man
  - c. Preaching the truth about repentance
  - d. Preaching the truth about Christ
  - e. Preaching the truth about salvation by faith
  - f. Preaching the truth about the Christian
  - g. Preaching the truth to the conscience
  - h. Preaching the whole counsel of God: applying law and gospel to the whole of life
- 3. Principles for making the truth relevant
  - a. Make biblical scenes and characters alive today
  - b. Employ illustrations for workaday world
    - c. Let application flow out of the text being expounded
  - d. Make the application specific
    - e. Provide right motivation

f. Bring forth things "old and new"

C. Need for cultivating holiness

1. In your preaching

2. In yourself as preacher

a. Prayer vs. ministerial prayerlessness

b. Humility vs. spiritual pride

D. Need for holy compulsion

1. Necessity is laid upon me to preach

2. Preaching Christ

VII. Closing Sermon: Luke 22:31-32